

North Carolina Academic Standards Review Commission

K-12 Education Standards Revision

Recommendations for Course of Action and Timeline for Completion

Preliminary Findings

The Academic Standards Review Commission (hereby referred to as the “Commission”) began its analysis of North Carolina’s K-12 Academic Standards on September 22nd, 2014. A total of 5 meetings have convened thus far. During this time, Commission members received hard copies of the K-12 Math and ELA academic standards, the supporting “unpacking” documents and various standards-related web links and flash drives. Over the course of two meetings, administrators from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction established a knowledge base of the Common Core State Standards by thoroughly explaining how and why North Carolina adopted the Common Core State Standards initiative, the timeline and procedures used for implementation and curriculum alignment, and the professional development opportunities offered to the teaching staff. We were also given in-depth reviews of the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math standards themselves, with ample time allotted for questions and comments.

The Commission has also established a website to promote and facilitate transparency, public accessibility, and open communication with identified stakeholders.

Based on the presentations, surveys, stakeholder input and testimony collected thus far, and following the criteria established under Section 2.(c) of SB 812, which is reproduced below, the Commission has concluded its preliminary analysis of the North Carolina K-12 Academic Standards (otherwise known as the Common Core State Standards) and have identified three inherent failings that must be corrected in order to ensure North Carolina’s academic standards are among the highest in the nation. They are:

- **Standards Simplification** - The standards framework and corresponding unpacking documents are too complicated, unnecessarily cumbersome, and contain too many terms unfamiliar to the lay person. Therefore, simplification and clarity is needed in order to meet the criteria 2.(c)(1)d. - “understandable to parents and teachers.”
- **Developmental Appropriateness** - The developmental appropriateness of the standards in the primary grades, particularly K-5, do not adequately reflect the most widely accepted research on the stages of child cognitive development. Additionally, the high school math standards have been found to be rigorously inferior. Many of the high school standards are simply copies of each other with no instruction guide proposed. Therefore,

- adjustments must be made to ensure appropriate sequencing; progression; and pacing of all grade-level Math and ELA content in order to meet criteria 2.(c)(1)a. "Increase students' level of academic achievement and 2.(c)(1)c. "Age level developmental appropriateness."
- **Teacher Flexibility** – National standards and a centralized federal education system, which is widely accepted to be the projected outcome of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, do not reflect the goals and priorities of the State of North Carolina. The less control a state has over its public education system, the less flexibility and decision making ability school-level administrators and classroom teachers have to meet the academic needs of their students. Given that Section 1.(a)(3) of SB 812 states: "North Carolina shall not enter into any agreement, understanding or contract that would cede control of the Standard Course of Study and related assessments," North Carolina must retain its Constitutional authority over its public education system – primarily through the development of a new set of academic standards - in order to return instructional flexibility and autonomy to the classroom, where it belongs. This will satisfy criteria 2.(c)(1)b – "Meet and reflect North Carolina's priorities."

With respect to this Commission's duties and responsibilities, SB 812 states the following:

"Section 2.(c) The Commission shall:

*(1) Conduct a comprehensive **review** of all English Language Arts and Mathematics standards **that were adopted by the State Board of Education** under G.S. 115C-12(9c) and **propose modifications** to ensure that those standards meet all of the following criteria:*

- a. Increase students' level of academic achievement.*
- b. Meet and reflect North Carolina's priorities.*
- c. Are age-level and developmentally appropriate.*
- d. Are understandable to parents and teachers*
- e. Are among the highest standards in the nation.*

*(2) As soon as practicable upon convening, and at any time prior to termination, **recommend changes and modifications to these academic standards** to the State Board of Education.*

(3) Recommend to the State Board of Education assessments aligned to proposed changes and modifications that would also reduce the number of high-stakes assessments administered to public schools.

(4) Consider the impact on educators, including the need for professional development, when making any of the recommendations required in this section."

The academic standards currently in place are, in essence, the identical Common Core State Standards adopted by the State Board of Education in June of 2010. The only change resulting from legislation is the standard's moniker. The Common Core State Standards are the copyrighted intellectual material of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. As such, they cannot be altered or changed, in whole or in part, without infringement of Federal copyright laws.

It should be noted that a sincere attempt was made to resolve the aforementioned copyright dispute. Formal requests were made by several Commission members to evaluate the State Board of Education contractual obligations as accepted upon adoption of CCSS; to secure a waiver, signed by the appropriate authority, releasing the Commission and all involved parties from any liability or future lawsuits; or the professional opinion of a high-level legal authority indicating the Commission has the authority to proceed with revisions. Section 2.(h) of SB 812 states: *"Upon the request of the Commission, all State departments and agencies and local governments and their subdivisions shall furnish the Commission with any information in their possession or available to them."* To date, none of the requested documentation has been delivered.

Absent this certification, the Commission must conclude that it cannot proceed with mere revisions of the standards and, therefore, has no alternative but to recommend the development of a new set of Math and ELA academic standards.

Recommendation for Course of Action

As outlined above, the Academic Standards Review Commission recommends the development and implementation of a new set of K-12 ELA and Math standards for the State of North Carolina.

Additional Recommendations and Action Items for Immediate Consideration

- 1.) Due to the absence of comprehensive research or empirical evidence supporting the assertion that Integrated Math is a superior teaching method to the traditional approach based on subject matter (i.e. Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry and various enrichment courses), the Academic Standards Review Commission strongly recommends the State Board of Education eliminate high school Math I, II and III, otherwise known as "Integrated Math," and return to the traditional math course curriculum as soon as possible.
- 2.) Due to funding ambiguities and appointment delays, the remaining truncated schedule does not allow the Commission to adequately prepare recommendations for a new set of academic standards, nor address testing alignment, implementation, or professional development

requirements. Therefore, we respectfully request an extension of time to complete the mission set forth by the General Assembly.

- 3.) The Commission must hear testimony from knowledgeable experts regarding the pro's and con's of Common Core Standards versus the non-Common Core Standards. Some of these professionals must be respected university faculty. Others must be respected North Carolina K-12 teachers with considerable teaching experience.
- 4.) Post secondary educators must be invited to give feedback regarding their students who necessitate remedial work. They are: The NC Community College system, UNC universities with remedial course offerings and the NCEMPT (NC Early Math Placement Test) organization, which gives diagnostic tests to high school students. Understanding these deficiencies will form the basis for more appropriate K-12 Math and ELA standards.
- 5.) States with non-Common Core standards (Nebraska, Virginia and Minnesota) use a quite different approach to "visual methods" that must be explored. In others states, there is more clarity about which methods should be used. These states must be consulted for increasing the clarity of North Carolina standards.
- 6.) Some countries, for example Finland, do an excellent job of teaching mathematics. It would be advantageous to review the instructional methods and academic standards these countries employ.
- 7.) Testimony from states that declined to adopt the Common Core State Standards and are in the process of improving or creating new academic standards (i.e. Virginia, Minnesota (math only), Nebraska, Texas, and Oklahoma), must be consulted to determine why they chose to develop their own standards and how they differ from the Common Core State Standards.
- 8.) Child development experts with extensive knowledge of education standards must be consulted. It would be best if they did not agree with the NCTM.
- 9.) Much more input from parents of public school students is needed. A Parents Panel must be established to participate in the standards development process. Additionally, we must request the Board of Education and the Department of Public instruction to do two things as soon as possible: 1) prominently display the ASRC website on their websites and 2) provide links to the actual state standards, as given to the ASRC, in a prominent way so that the public has access to the NC standards.

ASRC Timeline for Implementation of Recommendations and Action Items

- January 16th
 - Establish bi-monthly meeting dates.
 - Review DPI survey data, assuming it is available.
- February 16th
 - Dr. Megan Koschnick – Child Development Specialist: Conference

call or Skype review of developmentally appropriate academic standards based upon the most widely accepted research on the stages of cognitive development. Dr. Koschnick will also address other developmental pathways, i.e. social/emotional development. *Availability confirmed.*

- Questions/Comments
- Public Comment – Remaining meeting time will be allotted to the general public. Those who wish to testify regarding their personal experiences with the CCSS will be permitted 5 minutes to address the commission.
- Deliver ASRC Interim Report – Determine protocol and delivery method.
- Pre-reads for March meetings – Review Virginia State Standards and Massachusetts' pre-CCSS ELA standards (links will be provided and posted on the ASRC website).
- March
 - Conference call with Virginia Department of Education (*working on presenter*)
 - Questions/Comments
 - Input from Community College/UNC College System – Presentation on Math and ELA deficiencies found in high school graduates necessitating remedial courses (*Working on presenter*)
 - Invite Dr. Sandra Stotsky to the commission meeting. Dr. Stotsky, a leader in content standards, will give a brief overview of her experience as a member of the Common Core State Standards Validation Committee. A presentation of the Massachusetts K-12 ELA standards will follow. *Availability confirmed.*
 - Invite noted mathematician Dr. James Milgram to speak before the commission. Dr. Milgram, who served on the CCSS Validation Committee, will offer his recommendations for appropriate K-12 Math standards. *Availability confirmed.*
- April
 - Begin framework and development of new Essential Standards
 - Establish ELA and Math working groups, meeting format, etc.
 - Continue modifications of Essential Standards framework and begin in-depth standards development.
 - Establish Teacher Review Committee – member credentials, criteria for selection, meeting schedule, etc.
 - Establish Parent Panel – participation parameters, selection criteria, etc.
- May – August
 - Continue in-depth standards development and consultations with child development professionals and standards experts.
 - Collaborate with ELA and Math working groups, Teacher Review Committee and Parent Panel
- September

- Teacher Review Committee standards evaluation
 - Standards revisions posted for public consideration/feedback
- October
 - Compile Teacher Review Committee assessment of standards revisions and make changes as necessary
- November
 - Completion of standards recommendations and preparation of final report
- December 18th
 - Final commission report
 - Summary of incomplete deliverables